

Chapter XIV

CONCERNING METHOD AND TEACHING DEVICES

THERE is no word more often on the lips of teachers, especially music teachers, than the word 'Method.' Yet how comparatively few know what it really means, or *ask* themselves what it means and try to think out an answer for themselves.

492. We meet with different definitions of method; but though the actual phraseology may differ, the idea is always the same. It is—

'An orderly process toward a pre-determined end.'

'An orderly and rational procedure to attain definite results.'

'A progress toward an end.'

'A step by step approach to a distinctly defined goal.'

The simplest definition is Professor Laurie's—

'Method simply means a Way; neither more nor less.'

By this he catches those who deny the need for method. He says: 'You cannot, by any device, escape method. Admit that method is a way, and that methods are ways, and I defy any man to teach without them. No man ever did so. . . . You are devotees of method without knowing it. But *what* method? *What* way?'

493. Those words were used in an address to teachers thirty years ago. We have made progress

since then, but there are still many who say they have no method, and glory in it; they 'use their common sense,' and that is all that is necessary. Yet those who disclaim method disclaim purpose, disclaim an ideal, confess to bankruptcy in ideas about teaching, acknowledge that their daily work is a game of pitch and toss.

494. If method be not necessary, it is curious that all writers on education should either strongly insist on its necessity or, as the more recent writers do, take its necessity for granted.

'Only by sound method can we train and discipline faculty.' Method must enter into the way of teaching every subject and every lesson in every subject.'—*Laurie*.

Sir Oliver Lodge, too, while he thinks it *possible* that the motherly instinct of a lady teacher may be sufficient to enable her to care for very small children, holds that for all other teachers 'training in method is absolutely essential.'

495. Before we can say what method means we must be sure that we know what teaching means. The teacher's power is limited. She cannot learn for her pupil. As I said in Chapter I (5), all that the best teacher can do is to cause her pupils to exercise their own mental activity. The act of learning is the pupil's act. 'Teaching is simply helping the mind to perform its own functions of knowing and growing.'

496. If that be so, the teacher must know how the mind performs those functions. And that is just what we have been studying, is it not, in all the previous chapters of this book? *We cannot*

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separate methodology from psychology. In every chapter the teacher's use of each psychological fact has been illustrated by some example of method; mainly, but not exclusively, from music teaching. We have been studying method all the time. If we now devote some additional pages to its consideration, it is to show further how the accepted principles and maxims of teaching have their roots in psychology.

497. The principle which lies at the back of all maxims of method is that 'the teacher's way of working must conform to the mind's way of working.' In approaching a subject the first thing to ask ourselves is, 'How does the normal mind approach it?' We know that elementary knowledge of all kinds reaches the mind through the senses (46); but different kinds of knowledge enter through different senses (133). At which gateway must we knock for the reception of those elemental facts with which we must begin?

498. And then, how much do we know about our pupil's stock of ideas (395)? We must tack on somewhere (396); where shall we find our point of contact (397)? What preparation has experience given them for the assimilation of the thing we want them to know? Are they *ready* for our subject (3)? What is their stage of development? Suppose your subject to be music; are they physically fit for the practice of an instrument (429), mentally ready for the association of sound and symbol (112); or are they still at the stage when their chief need is to store up material for future use (305), when their work as pupils is

simply to listen and imitate (366)? All those questions have to be answered before we can begin, and our psychology helps us to answer them.

499. If method is a step by step approach to an end it is evident that we must consider the end from the beginning, and always keep it in view. You are starting on a journey with children for companions. It is well to give them, too, an idea of whither they are going, and to let them at every turn of the road see clearly a little way in front of them. It gives them faith in your guidance, and there is interest in anticipation.

500. Here some young teacher may say, 'Must I then be always thinking about psychology when I am teaching?' No; to try to do that would hinder, not help. *Let it soak in*, and you will find that when you are teaching is just the time when you will not think of it at all. If you are clear as to your final goal, your psychology will give you your general sense of direction, and the pupil's need will prompt the next step.

501. What are called the principles of method are derived from the laws of mind. The reader can prove that here and now. Take half-a-dozen of the well-known maxims of method, and ask yourself after reading each, 'Why should this be true?' In seeking an answer you will find yourself turning over in your mind whatever psychological or psycho-physiological facts you know, and it is among these that you will find it. Try the experiment on the following six:—

(a) Teach the thing before the sign.

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(b) In training the mind teach the concrete before the abstract.

(c) In developing physical skill, teach the elemental before the compound.

(d) Proceed from the known to the related unknown.

(e) From the particular to the general.

(f) From wholes to parts.

And then try whether you can give an example of each from the teaching of your own or any other subject. The experiment will help you to see clearly, to think definitely, and if you have any measure of success you will know that whatever you have learnt of the facts of psychology is beginning to be of practical use to you.

502. We have next to distinguish between Method and *Methods*. As the mind takes in different kinds of knowledge in different ways, it is obvious that all subjects cannot be taught in the same 'way.' History demands a different method from arithmetic, and music has to be taught differently from either. Hence, for special subjects there must be special methods. But such special methods will—if they are right methods—be *applications* in various directions of the laws of general method; using original plans and devices but always keeping 'within the law.'

503. I have already pointed out (11) that every text-book in school use is a method; the method which to its author seems the best 'way' of teaching that subject. For the sub-divisions of a subject, too, teaching plans will differ—physical and political geography call for different treat-

ment—and for different stages of *the same* subject there will again be differences of method as we follow the mind's development.

504. Some people seem to resent the idea of following a method devised by somebody else. The suggestion is a kind of personal insult. They cannot be 'cramped,' 'tied to a method,' and so on. I notice, too, that the legend that every teacher should compile her own method is almost becoming a catch-word, and is always received with a round of applause.

505. There was once a great educator called Comenius, who, though he lived in the seventeenth century, is still often quoted in books about teaching. Now, Comenius said that there is only *one* method for teaching all the arts, sciences, and languages. What do you make of that? Was Comenius wrong, and are we right to-day when we say that there should be as many methods as teachers? Can we reconcile the two statements. I think we can; but we must now make a further distinction between method and teaching devices.

506. What did Comenius mean? He meant, I think, that whatever the subject matter of the teaching may be, 'the teacher's way of working must conform to the mind's way of working.' That is the one method of teaching all things. And I have a notion that when people tell you that every teacher must have her own 'Method,' they are really thinking about the 'devices' necessary for the application of any method to individual pupils or classes.

507. *Every teacher must have her own teaching-*

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devices. The fact that no two pupils are alike in character, in experiences and mental content, is enough to prove that each pupil is a separate problem for the teacher. Daily, hourly, she may have to invent fresh 'ways of putting things,' illustrations and analogies fitted to individual pupils, additional exercises for the slow-brained, and so on. Without such devices the best method ever elaborated might prove a dead thing, and a teacher who cannot thus respond to the unexpected in her pupils is really not of much use. But devices are not method for all that.

508. 'A successful educational method arranges all the necessary difficulties of the subject in such a progressive order that each one shall be a step toward the other, and that the steps from one to the other shall be sufficiently difficult to stimulate effort without being so difficult as to discourage; and the *unnecessary* difficulties it removes out of the way. Such a method must be the result of a careful analysis of the subject to be taught, and a long experience in dealing with pupils studying it.'—*John Curwen.*

509. If the formulating of a method calls for so much knowledge of mind and its development as we have found to be necessary, for so much power in applying that knowledge, so much insight, so much prescience, so much experience, have we any right to demand that every teacher shall compile her own method, that there shall be as many methods as teachers? It would surely be an ideal state of things, and devoutly to be wished; but a moment's thought should convince us that, whatever may happen in a far-off Utopia, under present conditions it is impossible.

510. The young amateurs of this country are

mostly taught by girls who hold the L.R.A.M. and A.R.C.M. diplomas. How many of these are capable of analysing their subject, of developing it step by step, judging of what to teach and what to leave out in the early stages; of what to add, and how, and when, as the pupil progresses? And even when we provide them with a body of principles, as within the past few years we have been endeavouring to do, will this enable them all at once to formulate their own methods?

511. A higher authority than mine must answer that question. Sir Oliver Lodge assures us in plain words that method '*cannot be evolved by each teacher for him or herself. There is a theory to be known and a practice to be learnt.*' Professor James is of the same opinion. He warns teachers that '*you make a great, a very great mistake, if you think that psychology is something from which you can deduce definite programmes and schemes of instruction for immediate schoolroom use*' (which is equivalent to saying that every teacher cannot make her own method); '*an intermediary inventive mind must make the application*' (8). And when he says that a knowledge of psychology will give us confidence in *any method we may be using* if we find that it is sound in theory (11), he takes for granted that teachers will use methods which are not of their own devising. Other writers seem to take it for granted too. Professor Laurie says: '*Regard every lesson in the text-book as merely the central point of the true lesson, which should be a conversation, starting from that lesson.*'

512. A methodizer who claimed that his method

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of teaching was warranted, line for line, to fit every individual child like a glove would be a quack. We always look askance on a 'one and only' way of doing anything, and a teacher who retails any method in unvarying fashion is in a fair way to become a mere method-monger.

513. The methodizer works by averages. Say it is a method of music teaching. His imaginary pupil is of only average musicality—rather under than over, to be on the safe side. The child will also be of what we call average general intelligence, but no definite mental content can be assigned him. The notion of him is founded on what is known of child development, backed by experience. All that the methodizer attempts to do is to look at the beginnings of his subject from the point of view of the average child of suitable age for the subject; and then, starting from a probable point of contact with the mind of that typical child, to unfold his subject in logical order, seeing all round the subject and seeing the end from the beginning. Keeping the average child in his mind's eye, he gives you a series of lessons, *mainly as samples* of what such lessons, in his judgment, should be. The method he offers you is, in fact, 'for example,' writ large.

514. The real child that the teacher takes in hand may be better equipped, or less well equipped with musical and general intelligence. This is *her* opportunity. She has to investigate this real child's stock of apperceptive ideas and find a point of contact for the first lesson. The illustrations and devices given in the book will probably be effec-

tive with a large proportion of her pupils, but it is almost certain that they will not suit all, or be sufficient for all. Every method must be modified in its minor details to suit the conditions of the class or the individual pupil. So no teacher need fear that she will be cramped or her originality fettered by following a method. Contending with the idiosyncrasies of her various pupils will give scope for all the originality, ingenuity, and presence of mind she may possess. Between the psychologist and the teacher stands the methodizer; and between the methodizer and the individual child stands the individual teacher. In the service of the child all three are needed.

515. One of the ways in which teachers may help each other is by passing on devices which have proved helpful to themselves. Listen to a group of teachers 'talking shop.' As they discuss the shortcomings and difficulties of their pupils, you will often hear, 'Have you ever tried this?' But devices are more likely to fit the case if they are the teacher's own. Some will be thought out when preparing a lesson; others will flash into the mind at the moment of giving it, meeting difficulties as they arise. A professor of psychology and pedagogy in an American normal college, speaking about training, says that even when watching the skilled teacher at work (the most important part of training next to mind-study), much discrimination is needed, and the observer should be taught 'to distinguish the essential from the accidental, *to separate method from devices*, and to look beneath the manner of the teacher for the

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real work performed.' Again, when warning against the mere imitation of the model teacher, he says, 'The general method of procedure may be adopted, and to some extent imitated, but the devices employed, and all that is included under the somewhat indefinite term "manner," should be one's own.'

516. You see, then, that devices are very important, so important that they should not be used thoughtlessly. Teachers who have no knowledge of method in its wider sense are in danger of being caught by devices, and adopting them without inquiring as to what end they serve. They will take plans from several methods, some of which may be actually opposed to each other; so that there is danger in eclecticism if it is not guided by sound knowledge.

517. We may easily overdo devices. John Curwen wrote at one time:

'Devices have grown upon us to such an extent of late years that there now needs a little caution, lest the more important things are more or less buried alive under the extensive elaborations of the system, or neglected by an exaggeration of the importance of these many ingenuities. And it will become the most valuable trick of teaching to know where tricks must stop.'

To a teacher who is prolific in devices this is a needed warning. The simpler the teaching the better.

518. I have dwelt upon this difference between method and devices because I have found that some young teachers have felt discouraged by being told that, given a set of good principles, they

should compile their own methods. They know they cannot do it, and they ask: 'Am I fit to teach at all if I am so helpless?' Substitute the idea of 'devices' for that of 'method' and the difficulty disappears. *A special method* may be likened to the architect's plan: *Method* in its wider sense to the science that enabled him to make it; *Devices* to the material through which the building takes shape. Or, *A method*, again, is the road that the engineer lays out from point to point; *General Method* the science that he has applied in the work; *Devices* the ways in which other people can beautify the road and make it easy and pleasant for the traveller.

519. It is possible that the young teacher who to-day is following some one else's method may, with the fuller knowledge and experience of years, evolve something still better, and be one of the methodizers of the future. That every teacher will do so is extremely unlikely, and there will always be a generation growing up who have to learn how to teach. It seems probable that for a little while at least the intermediary mind will be needed.

520. All art begins with imitation, the art of teaching included, and the young teacher must have some sort of model to begin with. As she gains experience and skill in the adaptation of the method she has adopted, it will become to her mainly a reminder of the right order of presentation, a framework to be filled in from day to day with devices for the day's needs. She will find more and more freedom in teaching; but if the

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method is a right one—and one of the uses of her psychology is to enable her to decide whether it is a right one (9)—she will not depart from its order; because it will help, in itself, to build up the apperception masses by which its own successive steps shall be assimilated (378).